Design Course

Outdoor Graffiti Murals

Using the wall as a canvas

by
Prof. Sumant Rao, Prof. Nina Sabnani, Ruchi Shah and Piyush Verma
IDC, IIT Bombay

Source:
https://www.dsource.in/course/outdoor-graffiti-murals

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Introduction

What is an outdoor graffiti mural? They can be large vibrant beautiful paintings made to liven up the city, get across a message to the widest audience around. Such artworks follow little or no rules with an undercurrent of underground subcultures.

Why make them?
• To add a dash of colour to the otherwise grey urbanscapes.

• Using art to get across a message.

• As a form of resistance.

• To give people a chance to view and share something creative, beautiful, abstract or unexpected in a public space to be interpreted any way they want to.

... or just for the fun of it.

Where are these murals made?
You will often find them in busy, bustling streets, dull lifeless parking lots, in lanes and alleys, where you wouldn't expect to find them. It depends on why are you making it, by whom is it to be seen and what it is reflecting. They are also often done in sections of the city that need a makeover of some kind.

Who makes them?
Anyone with a passion for painting and expressing their thoughts. Artists who want to share their work through public spaces. People who are affected by the changing times, cities and lifestyles use it as a form of resistance and a creative expression of protest.

Graffiti Murals have their origins as acts of vandalism, messing up of public spaces and properties. This was an expression of defiance against the 'authorities' towards whom they felt resentment. They were often a form of marking territories for street gangs.

However, graffiti murals today have evolved into an art form where local people and artists come together to participate in reviving neighbourhoods, uplifting the forgotten parts of the city through biennales and street art shows. In many cities across the world, specific areas and sections of the cities are reserved for such artworks.

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A graffiti on the Ghats of the Ganges by an Portuguese artist. With mixed cultures and a strong subculture of Hinduism, Varanasi makes a good canvas for Graffiti murals, which are sketched on the Ghats by artists from India and beyond.

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Graffiti on the Ghats of Ganga

One is compelled to take pictures of the graffiti on the Ghats of the River Ganga. Artists and travellers from across the world have been moved or motivated to leave behind an imprint of their soul searching on the Ghats through some beautifully rendered artworks.

However, some newspapers and locals have a different story to tell. They feel the painters are defacing the ancient walls of the Ghats. Tourists who travel to see the wonder of the River Ganga are treated with pathetically painted advertisements and images on the Ghats. Their opinion is that this disgraceful movement of vandalism needs to be kept in check.

Ads apart, some artworks do transcend their purpose and look good, adding another dimension to the place. It is a marriage of east and west, culture with art and the merging of two expressions of purity; manmade and god made. It is also a method to keep locals from messing up the Ghats and the walls with their daily activities.

A rustic looking cycle rikshaw painting on the Ghats, by an artist called Oliver.

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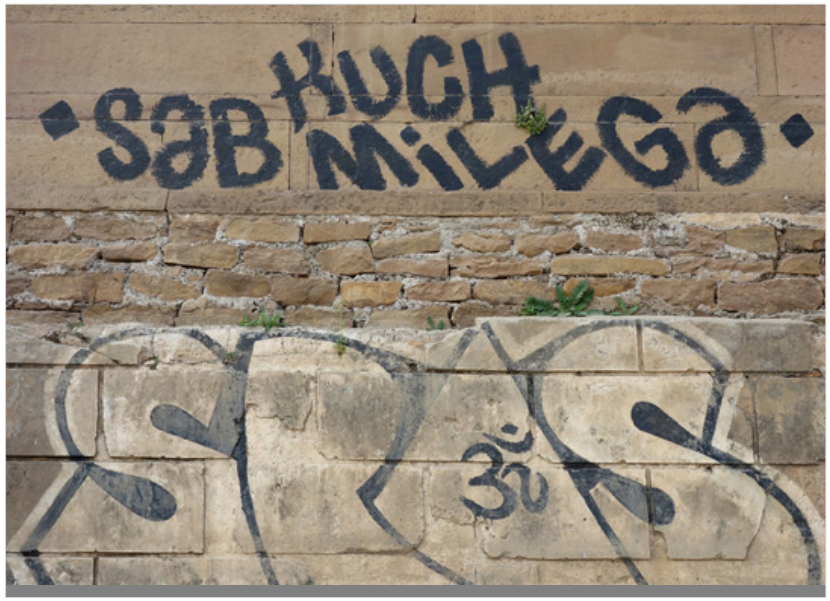

'Sab Milega' or 'Kuch Milega' ? Or Sab Kuch Milega? How do you read this?.

Videshi Babaji - is a connotation to a holy man from ' foreign' - reading between the lines it is a pun on the pot-smoking 'free spirited' folks on spiritual journeys.

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Finding true love amidst shit.

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Tea and Boat - a tea shop sign painted by a some Korean tourists for a popular Tea Stall on Pandey a.k.a Korean Ghat.

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Shiva - Ganesha - Parvati, Sathya Sai Baba, Ram - Seeta - Hanuman or Sai Baba, have your pick, or pray to them all at one go. Godly families or single saints - are depicted in this mural painted by S K Arts. Ironically this is a commissioned ad for an insurance and estates company with 'Revocable trust', two contradicting words as the tag line (lower right corner).

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And Videshi Babaji painted again, in the claustrophobic streets above the Ghats.

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A single vibrantly painted fish in one of the smaller lanes, painted for no specific reason..

Taking outdoor paintings to another extreme are the common sermonic signs painted on the Varanasi river front. Warning, cautioning, preaching or pleading these signs seem to be more of a personal public welfare project that have been painted by an anonymous 'Atmaram - Grasis' on each Ghat.

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Outdoor Wall Painting

From the 'Wall Painting' module we have already seen the process of ideating, sketching, preparing the surface etc. with examples. However, for an Outdoor Graffiti mural there are some more things that need to be considered.

Now although many methods of painting a mural exist, the general things that should be kept in mind are the idea, ratios, preparation, equipment, the location and painting. If one takes the time to consider each of these carefully the chances of making a beautiful mural are higher.

Theme

Equipment

Location

Painting process

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Theme

Unlike a painting created indoors or made for a client, it is not necessary to have a specific theme, size or method of painting on a wall in an outdoor space. It may reflect what the space has to offer or it may not, making it open ended for the artist and the viewer. There should be something/anything that affects or matters to the artist more than anything else which could become the basis for deciding what to draw. It becomes more interesting when associated with the undercurrent of the city, its people and the location.

The sketch also allows the artist to visualise the proportions and ratios of the artwork in comparison to the original wall size, it helps in laying-out the rough skeleton of the artwork.

After spending some time on the Ghats of the Rive Ganga. This is the sketch I made in my book. Everyone has something on their mind and most of these things resurface when we are spending some time peacefully. The mind always projects on to us, what it wants. Whether it is shallow, superficial, simple or spiritual is another question altogether. This sketch became the reference point for my artwork.

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Equipment

Painting Tools:
Paint Brushes, Spray Paint, Paint Rollers, Roller Extension, Masking Tape, Markers, Paint Tray, Primer, Bucket of Water and a Ladder. Most of the equipment is similar to the equipment required for Indoor Wall paintings. But while travelling or hunting for a good spot to paint in, it helps to travel light by carrying Stainers (concentrated shades of colour) and an emulsion base (to mix the Stainer into, for making the actual paint), along with disposable paper plates and plastic containers to hold water and mix paint in.

Different types of paints can make a drastic different to the nature of the artwork. For exterior murals - Exterior emulsion paints, 100% acrylic paints or enamel based paints are preferred as the walls you are working on will be exposed to all sorts of weather conditions. Work out a quick budget and buy the paints accordingly. Applying these paints is entirely up to the artist. It can be sprayed or applied by brushes and rollers. For a really gigantic sized mural a paint sprayer machine can also be rented.

Optional Equipment:
Cleaning solvents, Fixer Sprays, Newspapers, Rags and Tissues.

Depending on the artwork you might need primer for a base coat followed by exterior emulsions etc. Don't forget to carry a pen knife or screw driver to prise open the cans of paint!

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Different varieties of spray cans are priced differently. Work out a budget before you can decide what you need to buy. Spray or Aerosol cans are convenient for filling larger portions of the artwork and while working with stencils & cut-outs.

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After choosing a spot to work in, set up a working area where all the material - paints, dishes, water and references can be laid out. It is easier to carry a single light base colour, and many small bottles of coloured Stainers which on mixing produce the exact colours, in the required quantity.

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Location

Choosing a particular spot is essential. This will determine the size and theme of the painting and if people interact with the artwork or not. It is possible that the visualization of the painting is what leads the artist in selecting a particular space, turning it into a canvas.

Will the wall you choose get the desired attention? If the street side is too busy the artworks message, may go unnoticed. However, if placed in slightly more open spaces like a parking lot, near a local park, hang out spots in smaller streets, people might notice it, enjoy it and the space might turn into a land mark.

What sort of a wall are you painting on? Can you make use of its existing qualities?

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Textures can be created or used in different ways. For instance the deep maroon shade above is actually red colour painted over a rusted metal sheet. Wall cracks can be used innovatively. This grey wall with leak marks all over it would make a nice setting for an image of a little girl holding an umbrella.

If you can draw from the type of surface that has to be painted upon, use its texture within the artwork. Or absorb the walls original colour into the illustration it generates a connection between the space and the artwork. However, this can depend upon the creator. Before beginning, it is helpful if the artwork is sketched out with a pencil across the surface. Some artists like working with worn out walls as it sets a totally different mood for their artwork, for such walls spray cans are preferred over paint; while other artists prefer working on smooth outdoor walls.

Having permission to paint on the outdoor space is preferred so that you don't run into any legal issues. However, it helps to carry your sketchbook or copy of work for people or the wall owner to see.

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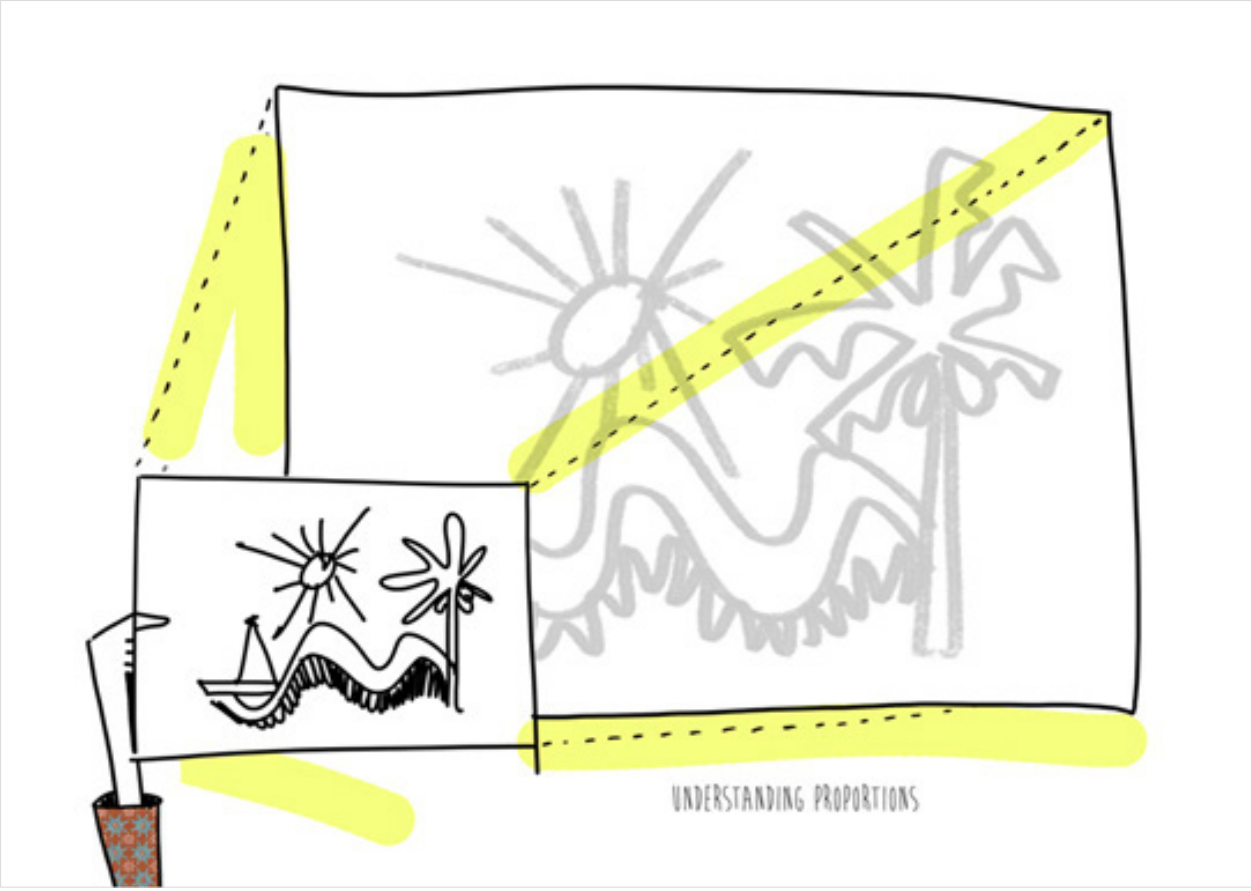
Painting process

1. After the sketch of the desired artwork is prepared, study it to understand how it will stand on the actual wall with its magnified proportions.



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2. Once you are ready, prime and clean the surface to be painted upon. Get rid of any dust, dirt and scrape off any excess paint if needed from the section where you need to paint.

ANY FLAT SHARP PIECES OF VENEER OR METAL PIECES WILL DO FOR EVENING OUT THE SURFACE AND SCRAPING THE DUST
BE SURE TO CARRY ATLEAST 2 DIFFERENT GRADES OF SAND PAPER FOR SMOOTHENING OUT THE WALLS
SCRATCH!! SCRATCH!

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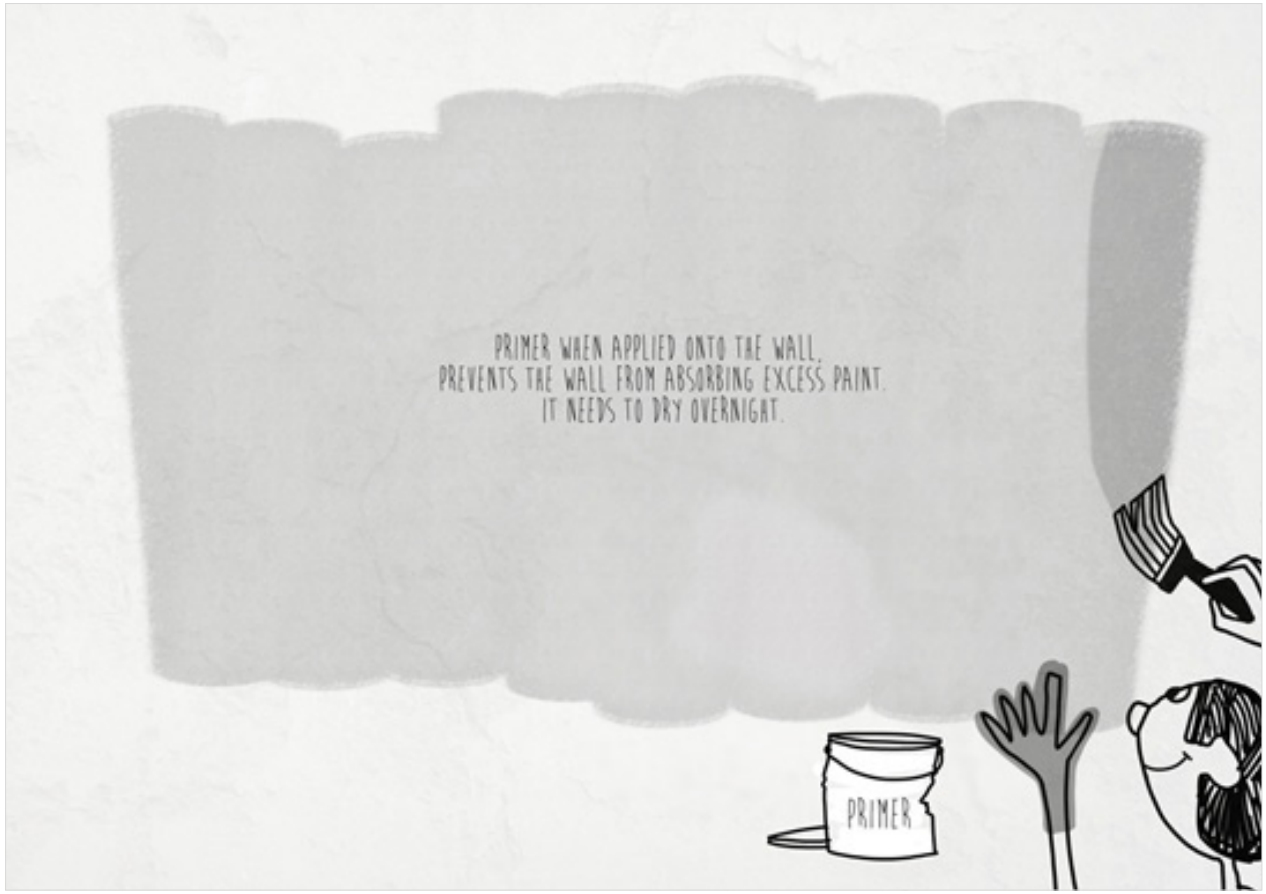
3. If required one can use a primer as the base coat on certain sections of the wall. This will prevent the outdoor wall from absorbing the paint and making the artwork dull eventually. Wait for it to dry.



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4. If the wall is very big you might require a grid to plot out the entire drawing. This means a square grid has to be drawn over the sketch and a proportionally bigger one has to be marked out on the wall. And following the grid on the sketch the drawing has to be made upon the wall. Most artists who have a better command over proportions prefer doing a free hand sketch.

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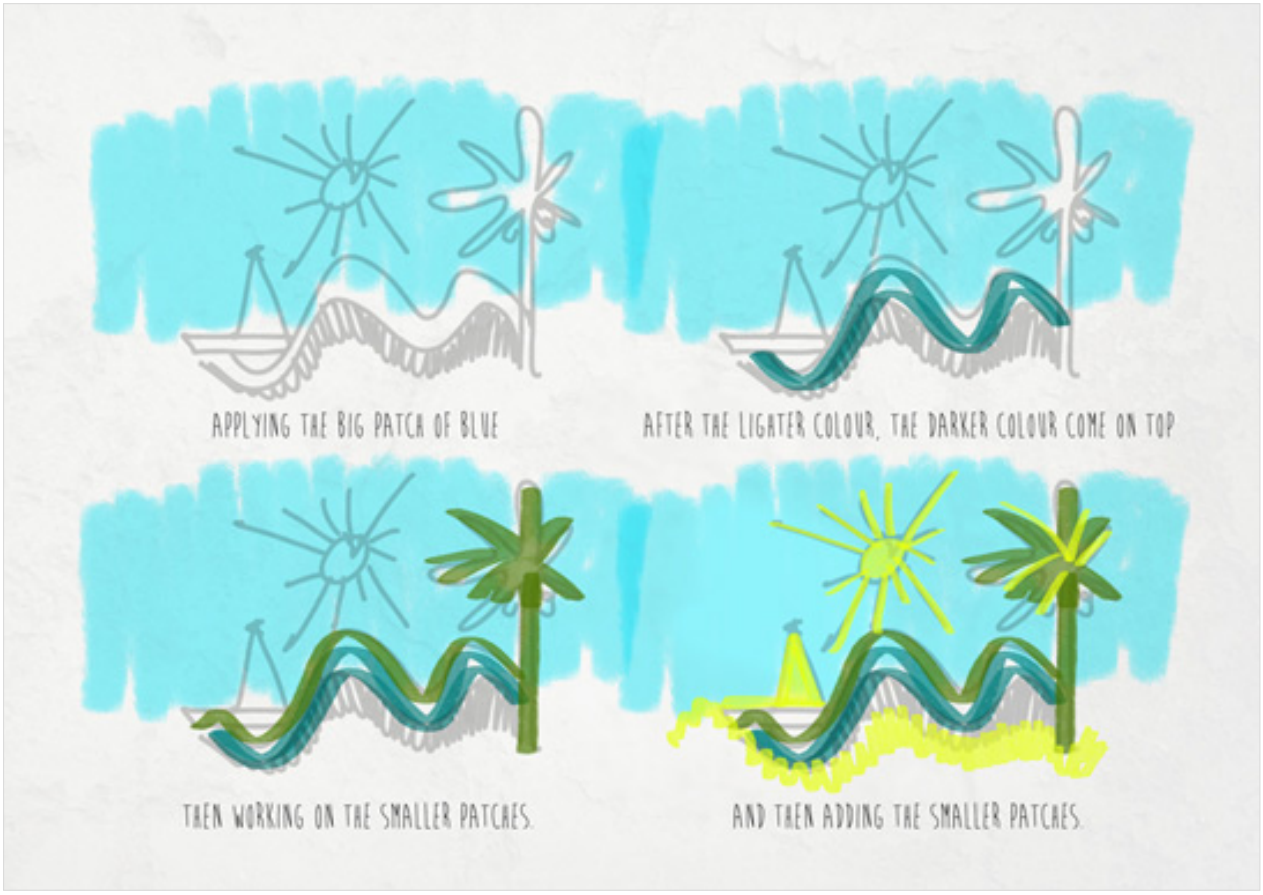
5. The design will always have to be painted back to front - meaning the bigger patches in the background have to be painted first followed by the next few elements and then finally doing the details. During this process if there are any mistakes made, they can always be rectified later.


APPLYING THE BIG PATCH OF BLUE
AFTER THE LIGHTER COLOUR, THE DARKER COLOUR COME ON TOP
THEN WORKING ON THE SMALLER PATCHES
AND THEN ADDING THE SMALLER PATCHES

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6. If overlapping colours or painting adjacent objects, please ensure that the previous coats of paint are dry or else the colours might get mixed. At times artists use stencils, card board cut-outs and masking tapes while filling certain shapes.

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7. With every level of painting, your tool of painting might change. For instance the bigger patches can be filled with rollers and spray cans. The smaller ones with flat brushes. And the details can be done with marker or paint pens.

Spray cans can be used for artworks with a bigger patch, and while painting upon rough, uneven surfaces.

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Rollers and thick brushes can be used to create the bigger patches of the artwork.

While detailing can be done with a finer brush & paint.

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8. Correct any mistakes or drips that you notice after the artwork is complete.

9. You might want to consider wearing a bandana or mask to keep your nose covered while working with the paints.

10. You could use a sealant or a fixer spray to give a final coat over the artwork to prevent it from getting damaged by the weather, also giving it a finished look.

11. While working one needs to step away from the artwork every few minutes in order to get the proportions and colours correct.

12. Clean your tools or else the brushes and paint may start drying up, becoming useless.

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6. Contact Details

13. Document all your artwork, take pictures. Interact with people when you can. And share your work.

Documenting the work.

Design Course

Outdoor Graffiti Murals

Using the wall as a canvas

by
Prof. Sumant Rao, Prof. Nina Sabnani, Ruchi Shah and Piyush Verma
IDC, IIT Bombay

Source:
https://www.dsource.in/course/outdoor-graffiti-murals/outdoor-wall-painting/painting-process

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2. Graffiti on the Ghats of Ganga
3. Outdoor Wall Painting
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   3b. Equipment
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A mother and child have a debate about the artwork, maybe interpreting it in their own way, on a particular evening on the Ghats.

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Working outdoors is a totally different challenge and remains an uncontrolled atmosphere. You may overlook the reaction the wall can have with the paints, as it remains a rough unfinished wall - there will be curious onlookers, and people who want to interact and decipher the artwork. Stray animals, strong winds, scorching sunlight or even worse ... rainfall also might be an interruption. But it can still be a lot of fun as you can see.

The young boatmen posing for a photo with the artists. The fun about working in an outdoor space, is the type of interactions and conversations that you can have with the people around.

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Links and References

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Credit Links from Creative Commons:

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Video

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Contact Details

This documentation was done by Ruchi Shah and Piyush Verma at IDC, IIT Bombay.

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